

# Indiana House of Representatives

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## News and Information

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### **STATEHOUSE REPORT FROM REP. RUSS STILWELL**

INDIANAPOLIS – During the 2005 session of the Indiana General Assembly, legislators passed 248 bills and two joint resolutions.

Those numbers fail to tell you the whole story. Many of these measures did not get the attention of the state budget or daylight-saving time, but they will have a lasting impact on the lives of Hoosiers of all ages in areas like economic development, education and public safety.

In my final Report for 2005, I would like to highlight some of the legislation that was passed in this session. Many of these bills will become law in the next few months, and they might affect your lives.

Before getting to those subjects, let me remind you of my position about this session's major issues. I was opposed to the budget, particularly since it will increase property taxes while cutting funding for public schools. I opposed daylight-saving time, but now that the change has been approved, the new question will be whether most of Indiana moves into the Central Time Zone or stays in the Eastern Zone. Let me know your thoughts on this.

Economic development has been identified as a priority for the governor and this Legislature from the start, when the very first bill passed into law created a new public-private group (the Indiana Economic Development Corp.) that will serve as the lead for development efforts. I am pleased that my caucus was able to introduce changes to this corporation that will ensure it is accountable to the public, as it should have been in the beginning.

Other measures designed to help spur economic growth include increasing the research and development tax credit on research and development, phasing out the sales tax on research and development equipment, and extending the life and use of EDGE tax credits that help businesses retain and create jobs. We passed a measure that will speed the process of obtaining permits so developers can begin construction on new industrial sites. We also gave additional tax breaks to small business owners and reduced the potential that they will be harmed by government regulation. I remain concerned that offering too many tax credits will take away resources necessary for our public education needs.

All of these reforms may help economic growth in Indiana, but I am disappointed that nothing more was done to benefit our state's greatest resource: our working men and women. An effort to improve benefits for those workers injured on the job was turned away in the session's final hours. I authored the amendment that would have provided modest gains for our working Hoosiers across the state.

In education, this session will be as noteworthy for what we were able to stop as for what will become law. The state budget will shortchange many schools and force them to eliminate programs and lay off teachers, factors that will hurt our children's ability to get a quality education. This budget hit my district particularly hard.

Starting in the 2010-11 school year, students will have to complete the Core 40 curriculum in order to graduate. Core 40 requires students to receive credits in a series of advanced courses, including English and language arts, math, science, social studies and foreign languages.

Several proposals were defeated, including plans to move the ISTEP-plus test to the spring and revive the school voucher program, a Republican mechanism that would divert state dollars to private schools..

Other education bills will change the enrollment date for kindergarten to August 1 from July 1, require schools to adopt rules to prohibit bullying, and provide daily opportunities for students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance and observe a moment of silence. The state Board of Education will be required to set up cheerleading safety standards and guidelines.

Lawmakers took another critical step in combating the production and use of the drug meth. There will be restrictions on the sale of products that contain ephedrine or pseudoephedrine and are used to make meth. These two ingredients are found in most over-the-counter cold medicines.

It will be illegal to run an Internet Web site that is engaged in unlawful or professional gambling. Victims will be automatically notified when offenders are released from prison or have their status changed. Offenders on home detention will be ordered to wear monitoring devices to track their location. We also prohibit people in vehicles from having open containers of alcohol.

To ferret out fraud and corruption in state government, we helped the governor create an inspector general post. We improved the bill to provide checks and balances so that this appointed post doesn't have greater authority in handling cases than locally-elected prosecutors.

Other bills set to become law cover a variety of areas. Here is a sampling of that legislation.

Voters now will be required to show a photo ID before being allowed to cast a ballot, a move I feel will prevent many seniors and minorities from taking part in elections.

A new amnesty program will allow delinquent taxpayers to have a grace period in which to pay the state back taxes without interest, penalties or fees. Speed limits on interstates will increase from 65 to 70 miles per hour, and the limits on four-lane divided highways will increase from 55 to 60 mph.

When it came to reorganizing government, we created an Indiana State Department of Agriculture and Office of Rural Affairs and a Department of Homeland Security. Perhaps our most significant accomplishment in this area, though, was stopping the governor's plan to drastically reduce citizen participation in government by getting rid of hundreds of state board and commissions.

Even though the 2005 session is complete, I encourage you to stay in touch with me throughout the year if you have a question or concern about state government or any issues we will face in the Indiana General Assembly.

You can contact me by calling the toll-free Statehouse telephone number of 1-800-382-9842, e-mailing me through my Internet Web site at [www.IN.gov/H74](http://www.IN.gov/H74) or writing to me in care of the Indiana House of Representatives, 200 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.

Have a great summer. I hope to see you many times in the months to come.

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**This Report can be accessed on the Internet at [www.IN.gov/H74](http://www.IN.gov/H74)**